

Christ at the Centre

WHY THE CHURCH PROVIDES
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mgr Marcus Stock

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CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

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Contents

FOREWORD TO THE REVISED EDITION	4
CHRIST AT THE CENTRE	5
PREAMBLE	6
Q1 Why does the Catholic Church provide schools?	7
Q2 What are the fundamental characteristics of Catholic Schools?	10
Q3 How do these fundamental characteristics make our Catholic Schools distinctive? ..	13
Q4 Who are Catholic Schools provided for?	14
Q5 What are 'Gospel Values'?	15
Q6 What is a Catholic school's 'ethos'?	18
Q7 What should be the outward signs of a Catholic school's ethos?	19
Q8 What will enable a personal experience of a Catholic School's Ethos?	22
CONCLUSION	25
SUPPLEMENT	26
Introduction	26
Why does the Church insist that being a 'practising Catholic' is a requirement for holding certain key posts in Catholic Schools?	26
Is there a clear understanding of what the term 'practising Catholic' refers to when applied to key posts in a Catholic School?	28
What then is the objective definition of a 'practising Catholic' for appointments to membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school? ..	29
Does this mean that a 'practising Catholic' has to be 'perfect'?	30
What are examples of substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church?	31
What if a Catholic who has made a substantive life choice which is incompatible with the values of the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church, applies to be a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to a key post in a school?	32
What if a Catholic, appointed as a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to a key post in a school, subsequently makes a substantive life choice which is incompatible with the values of the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church?	33
Supplement Conclusion	34
APPENDIX A	
Requirements of the Catholic Church for appointments to membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within Catholic schools	35
APPENDIX B	
Statutory provision for schools with a religious character to maintain their relevant religious ethos	37

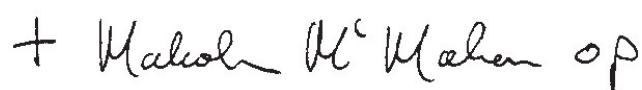
FOREWORD TO THE REVISED EDITION

At the Baptism of their children, parents promise to bring them up in the practice of the faith by loving God and their neighbour. The Church assists them in fulfilling this solemn commitment in two ways, by providing catechesis in our parishes and by establishing Catholic schools.

If the education of our young people is an important building block of the society in which we live and an indication of the vision for that society to which we aspire, then even more so are our Catholic schools central to the Church's mission. The Church's involvement in education goes back many centuries. In England & Wales, we have different types of Catholic schools, both maintained and independent. Within the maintained sector, we now have academies and voluntary aided schools. In the midst of this legitimate diversity, all Catholic schools share something in common: they are rooted in Christ, who is to be the centre of their life.

Unless a school has Christ at the very heart of all that it is and does, it cannot be a Catholic school. The ethos of our schools is not something extrinsic to the various aspects of a school's life. Rather, the Catholic ethos - and its concrete expression in liturgical prayer, assemblies and the teaching of religious education in accordance with the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* among other things - is fundamental to our schools, giving them true and lasting value. It should be incarnate in all aspects of school life, so that they may be effective instruments of the New Evangelisation.

I am grateful to Mgr Stock for publishing this important book, which will help priests, governors, teachers and parents to understand their role in supporting our Catholic schools and their mission, which is needed more now than ever.



✠ Right Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP
Bishop of Nottingham
Chairman of the Catholic Education Service

CHRIST AT THE CENTRE

I welcome warmly this document *Christ at the Centre* which puts forward, in a succinct yet rigorous manner, a summary of the Church's reasons for providing Catholic schools. It shows the depth of the commitment of the Catholic Church to education, not understood in some narrow sense but in the broadest and best possible way.

This document makes clear that Catholic education is inspired by a vision of life seen whole. Catholic faith tutors us in reaching out to the fullness of human experience and to its expression in a community of life in society.

At the heart of this understanding of life lies God, its creator. Indeed without acknowledgement of God as the source and destiny of all human life, efforts at education will always fail to reach beyond the pragmatic.

It is the great gift of Christian faith to know that God speaks to us, in a definitive way, in the person of Jesus Christ. That is why the title of this document is "Christ at the Centre", for Christ is the one who not only shows us the truth about God but also the truth about ourselves. Christ, then, is indeed at the centre of our educational endeavour.

I thank Mgr Stock for producing a document which is clear, systematic and authoritative. It has my full support and I know it will help many not only to understand the mission of Catholic schools but also to deepen their commitment to them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

✠ Vincent Nichols

Archbishop of Westminster

President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

PREAMBLE

“Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking...is a clear realisation of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness. One must recognise that, more than ever before, a Catholic school’s job is infinitely more difficult, more complex, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in fresh garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and, particularly, when a pluralist mentality dominates and the Christian Gospel is increasingly pushed to the side-lines.”¹

This passage written in 1977 and found in the Congregation for Catholic Education’s document *The Catholic School* is as relevant today as it was then, perhaps more so.² The phenomenal pace of developments in technology and communications, increasing secularisation and the challenges posed by a pluralistic and multi-cultural society face all schools alike. For Catholic education in particular, these developments and challenges call for: *“courageous renewal on the part of the Catholic school...And so, now as in the past, the Catholic school must be able to speak for itself effectively and convincingly.”³*

Catholic schools, and in England, Catholic academies⁴, are now a major component of the education system in England and Wales. As society has changed so too Catholic schools have changed to meet the contemporary needs of children and young people. Consequently, most Catholic schools have grown in quality and public esteem.

But why does the Church provide Catholic schools at all? And, why have resources been used to establish and develop these schools? What makes a Catholic school different from any other school?

Often, in answering such questions, concepts such as the ‘distinctiveness’, ‘ethos’ and ‘Gospel values’ of Catholic schools are used. However, despite their common currency within the world of Catholic education they are seldom defined. Without attempting in any way to give an exhaustive or authoritative definition, this document tries to draw together the key statements from the Church’s teaching on the provision of Catholic education, and specifically on Catholic schools, to help make these concepts more explicit.

Headteachers and Principals, members of a school’s or academy’s governing authority, staff and clergy may find this document helpful in forming a common understanding of these concepts and a useful resource when discussing and reviewing the Catholic identity and ethos of their own schools. The document may also be of service to the wider community by providing a summary of why the Catholic Church provides schools.

¹ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §66.

² *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §1.

³ *Ibid*, §3.

⁴ Throughout this document, the term ‘Catholic schools’ also applies to Catholic academies in England.

Q1 Why does the Catholic Church provide schools?

A1 The Catholic Church provides schools to:

A1.1 Assist in its mission of making Christ known to all people.

Jesus Christ is *“the way, the truth and the life”*.⁵ Those who profess this faith believe that in Christ the truth about Almighty God and the truth about the human person is revealed.⁶ The unfolding of this truth constitutes the Church’s teaching. The acceptance of this truth brings true freedom and the fullness of life. Proclaiming this truth, this Gospel (Good News), by making Christ known to all peoples, constitutes the mission of the Church.

The first key reason why Catholic schools are established, then, is to be part of the Church’s mission in education, to place Christ and the teaching of the Catholic Church at the centre of people’s lives. *“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.”*⁷ This evangelising mission is exercised through the diverse interaction of Catholic schools with their local parishes, families, societies and cultures they serve.⁸

To put Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of the educational enterprise is the key purpose of Catholic schools. In a Catholic school, the Church seeks to build the foundation our spiritual development, our learning and teaching, the formation of culture and our society in Christ.

The fullness of life is to be found when Christ is at the centre of our lives. The Church has therefore *“...in a special way the duty and the right of educating, for it has a divine mission of helping all to arrive at the fullness of Christian life”*.⁹ By placing Christ at the centre of all that they are and all that they do, Catholic schools have the potential to promote the *“fullness of Christian life”* through an *“...educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony.”*¹⁰

This means that the Church provides Catholic schools to be more than just places where pupils are equipped with learning and skills for the workplace and responsible citizenship. Rather, they are to be the communities where the spiritual, cultural and personal worlds within which we live are harmonised to form the roots from which grow our values, motivation, aspirations and the moral imperatives that inform our choices and actions as persons.¹¹ It is with good reason therefore that Pope Benedict XVI described Catholic schools as *“an essential resource for the new evangelization.”*¹²

⁵ John 14:6.

⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965, §22.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators*, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008.

⁸ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §16-17.

⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.794 §1.

¹⁰ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §34.

¹¹ *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration of Vatican II on Catholic Education, 28 October 1965, §19.

¹² Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators*, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008.

A1.2 Assist parents, who are the primary educators of their children, in the education and religious formation of their children.

Schools are to be found within nearly every society throughout the world, although they may have very different structures and modes of operation. The establishment of Catholic schools within these different societies and cultures is considered by the Church to be “...a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person, since the school is the centre in which a specific concept of the world, of the human person, and of history is developed and conveyed.”¹³

In this context the Church teaches that: “Among the means of advancing education, Christ’s faithful are to consider schools as of great importance, since they are the Principal means of helping parents to fulfil their role in education.”¹⁴

Thus, the second key reason why the Church provides Catholic schools is to assist parents in the education and religious formation of their children: “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking.”¹⁵

A1.3 Be at the service of the local Church - the diocese, the parish and the Christian home.

The partnership between the home, the parish and the Catholic school integrates these components of Catholic education: “The parish community is a place for religious and spiritual education. School is a place for cultural education. The two dimensions must be integrated, because the same values inspire them: they are the values of Christian families who, in a society dominated by relativism and threatened by existential emptiness, intend to offer their children an education based on the unchangeable values of the Gospel.”¹⁶

A Catholic school can never be though, a substitute for the parish community. Consequently, the fundamental partnership that should be developed and fostered is one between the school, its parish or parishes and the bishop/diocese. This partnership provides the source of a school’s authentic ecclesial foundation - its mission and communion within the Catholic Church - and forms the secure basis for the school’s mission and communion with the parish and the home. Being at the service of the local Church and fostering communion within the local Church is then the third key reason why Catholic schools are provided.

¹³ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §8.

¹⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.796 §1.

¹⁵ *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration of Vatican II on Catholic Education, 28 October 1965, §3.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, Address to Teachers and Students of the Catholic Villa Flaminia Institute, Rome, 23 February 1997.

A1.4 Be “a service to society”¹⁷

The fourth key reason why the Catholic Church provides schools is to contribute to the creation of a society that is highly educated, skilled and cultured. For this reason the Church emphasises the contribution that Catholic schools make to the common good¹⁸ of society and its culture.

Although generally Catholic schools are provided first and foremost for the Catholic community and to facilitate the right of Catholic parents to choose a Catholic education for their children, they are also very much a public good whose benefits enhance the whole of society. In this sense, Catholic schools, “...like State schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them.”¹⁹ The provision of Catholic schools therefore, plays a significant role in contributing to social cohesion by respecting the rights of parents and by maintaining educational diversity.

Ethnic and racial diversity is, and always has been, a feature of the Catholic Church’s trans-national presence, identity and membership. In Catholic schools, this ethnic and racial diversity finds unity in a common religious faith and produces the shared core human values which contribute to authentic social cohesion. In a multi-faith society, shared core values which promote respect for the rights and dignity of every human person are essential for social cohesion.

A religious education which enables pupils to be confident and secure in their own religious faith, as well as being knowledgeable and respectful of other religions, plays a key role in building a cohesive society. Thus, “In Catholic schools, teaching of religion must help students to arrive at a personal position in religious matters that is consistent and respectful of the positions of others, so contributing to their growth and to a more complete understanding of reality”.²⁰

¹⁷ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §33-37 & *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §4.

¹⁸ The common good consists of three essential elements: i) respect for the dignity of the human person; ii) social well-being and development and iii) peace and justice (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1905-1912).

¹⁹ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §16.

²⁰ *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002, §54.

Q2 What are the fundamental characteristics of Catholic Schools?

A2 Consequent upon the reasons why they are provided, Catholic schools should exhibit the following four fundamental characteristics which promote the permanent principles of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of human life, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity.

A2.1 *“An integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation”*²¹ and a *“systematic catechesis”*²² of *“Catholic teaching”*²³

Every human being is created in God’s image and likeness and therefore is valuable and worthy of respect. Human life at every stage of development, from conception to natural death, is precious and thus worthy of protection and respect. Concretely, this will mean that Catholic schools should:

- Place Christ at the Centre of all that it does. This will mean integrating Gospel values²⁴ and the teachings of the Catholic Church into every aspect of learning, teaching and the totality of school life: *“Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution’s life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.”*²⁵
- Ensure that a child’s or young person’s journey into adulthood should also be a journey of faith, a journey which recognises that true justice, peace and human freedom require, first and foremost, respect for the dignity of human life from conception until natural death.²⁶
- Endeavour to offer *“to all, and especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation”*.²⁷

²¹ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §33-37 & *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §4.

²² *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, 16 October 1979, §21.

²³ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.779.

²⁴ See A5.1.

²⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008.

²⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, §15.

²⁷ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §15.

A2.2 “A mission in education as a work of love”²⁸

The common good requires that social conditions allow all people to reach their full human potential and realize their human dignity. Concretely, this will mean that Catholic schools should:

- Provide a broad and balanced education which will help children and young people grow to their full human potential, and pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that “...all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young persons are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life”.²⁹

A2.3 “An ecclesial and cultural identity”³⁰

The principle of subsidiarity recognises that social responsibilities should be carried out at the lowest and most local level of organisation, unless this is beyond their capacity and resources. It recognises the legitimate identity and autonomy of the human person, the family, and local communities. Concretely, this will mean that Catholic schools should:

- Have the freedom and determination to teach and promote the Catholic Church’s teachings and to maintain their unique religious character in areas like governance, leadership, staffing, religious education and admissions.
- Provide a learning environment and a partnership with families in which parents are encouraged and assisted to see the home they provide as their child’s first and best school. “This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs.”³¹
- Form an integral part of the spiritual, pastoral and community life in the local parish and parishes, the diocese and the universal Church. “The Catholic school has...a clear identity, not only as a presence of the Church in society, but also as a genuine and proper instrument of the Church. It is a place of evangelization, of authentic apostolate and of pastoral action... The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the Church; it is based on an educational philosophy in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony. Through it, the local Church evangelizes, educates, and contributes to the formation of a healthy and morally sound life-style among its members.”³²

²⁸ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §33-37 & *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §4.

²⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.795.

³⁰ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §33-37 & *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §4.

³¹ *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration of Vatican II on Catholic Education, 28 October 1965, §3.

³² *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §33-34.

A2.4 “A service which is truly civic and apostolic”³³

According to the principle of solidarity, each person, as a member of society, is indissolubly linked to the destiny of society itself and to the destiny of the salvation of all men and women. Concretely, this will mean that Catholic schools should:

- Serve the human person and society by inviting all pupils to find meaning in their lives through forming a spirituality based on a mature relationship with Almighty God.
- Cultivate virtues and form personal values, rooted in the Gospel of Christ and expressed in the teachings of the Catholic Church, which will enable pupils to develop an understanding of their communal obligations, personal aspirations and their role as citizens in society and the world.³⁴
- Be at the service of the ecclesiastical authority (diocese or religious institute) under which the school operates by collaborating with, and supporting, other Catholic schools.
- Be willing, where appropriate, to support and collaborate with other local schools.

³³ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §4.

³⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.795.

Q3 How do these fundamental characteristics make our Catholic Schools distinctive?

A3 Catholic Schools are distinctive when they:

- Manifest a Catholic ethos which is evident and open to experience by all who enter the school.
- Promote Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church as an integral part of their mission.
- Follow policies that reflect and embody the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church.
- Model leadership inspired by the image and life of Christ.
- Form an integral part of the communion of the local and universal Church.
- Provide a religious education which comprehensively and systematically studies the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the lives of the Saints and the relationship between faith and life - all of which is integrated into every aspect of the curriculum and life of the school, and adapted to the age and ability of the pupils.
- Express the life of faith in acts of religion,³⁵ through personal and liturgical prayer.
- Foster conduct and behaviour governed, ordered and guided by the seven cardinal virtues³⁶ and rooted in Gospel values.
- Model Gospel values which unite society by promoting a citizenship rooted in a commitment to social justice and the common good.³⁷
- Attend to the spiritual needs of children and young people as a constant priority.
- Care for the pastoral and special needs of children and young people in accordance with Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church.
- Engender a culture of vocation.³⁸
- Uphold the dignity of the human person through the maintenance and care of school buildings and, through external and internal symbols and displays, manifest the centrality of Christ and the Catholic faith.

³⁵ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §83.

³⁶ The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1804-1809.

³⁷ *The Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §53 & §62.

³⁸ *New Vocations for a New Europe (In Verbo Tuo) Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations*, Final Document of the Congress on Vocations to the Priesthood and to Consecrated Life in Europe, Rome, 5-10 May 1997, §13 (b).

Q4 Who are Catholic Schools provided for?

A4 Catholic Schools are provided by the Church for Catholic children and young people who, through baptism, have a right³⁹ to an education in the Catholic faith.

Catholic schools are the principal means of helping Catholic parents to fulfil their role in education.⁴⁰ Recognising this, the Trust Deeds of Catholic dioceses in England and Wales enable some of the charitable resources of the Church to be used to try to provide sufficient places for baptised Catholic children and young people in Catholic schools.

To ensure that Catholic children are given priority in the allocation of school places and benefit from this provision, the admission criteria of Catholic schools should be formulated in such a way that Catholic children and young people are always given priority in the allocation of school places over and above all other applicants:⁴¹ *“A Catholic school is never simply a school for those who choose it. A Catholic school is always, first of all, a school for Catholics. Of course, others who seek a place at the school are most welcome as long as space permits. They are fully part of the school community and greatly treasured.”*⁴²

³⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.793 §1-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, Can.796 §1.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, Can.794 §2.

⁴² Letter of Archbishop Vincent Nichols to Warwickshire Catholic Schools, 21 October 2004.

Q5 What are ‘Gospel Values’?

A5 The use of the term ‘values’ in relation to the content and message of the Gospel is relatively modern. Indeed the use of the term ‘values’ relating to moral beliefs and attitudes is also quite recent. It is important to understand what lies behind the use of this term today.

The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) used the term ‘values’ in opposition to any concept of an objective moral law. For Nietzsche values were subjective and relative; for him there are no objective virtues or vices, good or evil, right or wrong that are true for all and for all time. ‘Values’, in this sense, are subjective and refer to whatever an individual thinks is right or true for a particular set of circumstances and at a certain point in time.

This use of the term values has been absorbed into the vocabulary of modern society. In this context, values are often subjective, regarded as a question of personal preferences - what is right for ‘me’ or the community to which I belong. However, modern society still talks of, and to varying degrees promotes, a set of core human values or principles that are objective, trans-cultural, and universal, for example: responsibility, compassion, respect for others and honesty. Such core values and principles lay at the heart of the laws and ethics that govern societies and nations.

Blessed Pope John Paul II, in his writings and homilies, consistently used the term ‘values’ in ways that challenge modern societies and cultures to re-discover the foundation of their core values and principles: *“An urgent task awaits you: to re-establish the bonds which have been strained and sometimes broken between the cultural values of our time and their lasting, Christian foundation.”*⁴³

This is reflected in statements of the Church relating specifically to Catholic schools: *“For this reason the Catholic school, in committing itself to the development of the whole man, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfilment and unity in Christ.”*⁴⁴

The term ‘Gospel values’ is commonly used in Catholic schools and other Catholic institutions; however, unless the term is unpacked and a common understanding formed of what true Gospel values are, there is a danger that what should be an objective Christian foundation, will itself become a random list of subjective values.

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, Address to the Members of the Pontifical Council for Culture, *“Letting the Gospel take root in every culture”*, 10 January 1992, §6.

⁴⁴ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §9.

Whilst other 'values' may be found within the four Gospels and New Testament writings, it is the Beatitudes which: "...depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity".⁴⁵ Gospel values cannot therefore be values chosen subjectively from the vast corpus of the Old and New Testaments but are objective values revealed to us through Christ's proclamation.

Such objective values are to be found rooted in the Beatitudes, the proclamation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes also "...reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts"⁴⁶ and as such are the objective 'values' given by Christ himself.

A5.1 Whilst not definitive, the Gospel values based on the Beatitudes may be summarized as follows:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven"*⁴⁷

Values: **Faithfulness & Integrity**

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

Values: **Dignity & Compassion**

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"

Values: **Humility & Gentleness**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"

Values: **Truth & Justice**

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"

Values: **Forgiveness & Mercy**

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"

Values: **Purity & Holiness**

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God"

Values: **Tolerance & Peace**

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way"

Values: **Service & Sacrifice**

A5.2 Gospel values "...are a guarantee of peace and of collaboration among all citizens in the shared commitment to serving the common good".⁴⁸

Rooted in the teaching of Christ, these Gospel values should constitute the targets and outcomes of the educational enterprise in every Catholic school.

⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1717.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, §1719.

⁴⁷ Matthew 5:3-12.

⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II, 31 October 2004 Angelus Address on the occasion of the signing of the new European Constitution (29 October 2004).

For this to be possible, these Gospel values need to be explicitly named, their meaning unpacked and pupils helped to understand how they relate to their lives both at school, at home and in society. This enterprise is not in addition to the quest for high academic standards and vocational excellence but integral to it: *“Catholic schools, while providing a quality education, hold up Christian values to children, inviting them to build their own lives on them. Teaching these values, for those who know how to accept and live them consistently, yields highly positive results - as experience confirms - at the personal, family and professional levels.”*⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, Address to Teachers and Students of the Catholic Villa Flaminia Institute, Rome, 23 February 1997.

Q6 What is a Catholic school's 'ethos'?

The word 'ethos' comes from a Greek word (εθος) for custom or habit. It therefore refers to the characteristic conduct of an individual human life or group of people, the distinctive spirit of a culture or an era that can be objectively described and personally experienced.

In short, an 'ethos' is a way of living, behaving and doing things by people who, though diverse, follow common values and are united by a shared vision of life. It is often therefore used in a way that is closely linked with 'culture' and 'philosophy'.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of adequately defining any school's ethos⁵⁰, an attempt to define a Catholic school's 'ethos' may help to make the distinctiveness of Catholic schools more explicit.

A6 A Catholic school's 'ethos' may be understood to be the outward signs and the personal experiences of the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church in the totality of daily life in a Catholic school.

It should be carefully noted that the ethos of each Catholic school will, in addition to the presence of the factors listed below, be dependent on and varied by the changing population of pupils and staff as well as the genuine commitment of individual members of the school community (teachers primarily)⁵¹ to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church.

⁵⁰ "Differences in Schools: a question of ethos?", Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex, by Caitlin Donnelly, School of Public Policy, University of Ulster, September 1999.

⁵¹ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §26.

Q7 What should be the outward signs of a Catholic school's ethos?

A7 The outward signs of a Catholic school's ethos, in parallel with its distinctiveness (see A3 above), should be explicit and clearly displayed in the following elements:

A7.1 The school's legal governing documents⁵²

Within the school's legal governing documents there should be clear clauses which specify the school's Catholic identity or character and the ecclesiastical authority (diocese or religious institute) under which it operates,⁵³ and which require that religious education and religious worship will be provided in accordance with rites, practices, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church⁵⁴ and any specific directives issued by the diocesan Bishop.⁵⁵

A7.2 Mission Statement

A Catholic school's Mission Statement should be explicit in rooting the life of the school in the person of Christ and the teaching of the Catholic Church. It should express clearly that the Catholic school is at the service of the evangelising mission of the Church.

A7.3 Governance

The majority of the governing authority of the school must be practising Catholics (see Supplement), appointed by the diocesan ordinary or his agent.

A7.4 Leadership and Management

The importance of the role of teaching staff is acknowledged by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales: "*The preservation and development of the quality and distinctive nature of Catholic schools depends on the faith, practice and commitment of the teachers in the schools, working with their Governing Authority.*"⁵⁶ The Bishops require that the Headteacher or Principal, Deputy Headteacher or Vice-Principal, and Head of RE/RE Co-ordinator must be practising Catholics. Preferential consideration should also be given to practising Catholics for all teaching posts and for non-teaching posts where there is a specific religious occupational requirement, i.e., chaplaincy post.⁵⁷ In England and Wales statutory provision allows for such preferences to be made.⁵⁸

⁵² In a Catholic Voluntary Aided school, the school's legal governing documents will be the school's Instrument of Government and the Trust Deed of the diocese or religious institute under which the school operates. In a Catholic Academy, the school's legal governing documents will depend on the legal structure of the individual Academy Trust that has been determined by the founding diocese or religious institute but will include the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Funding Agreement and any connected legal documentation.

⁵³ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.803 §1: "A Catholic school is understood to be one which is under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority."

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Can.804 §1: "The formation and education in the Catholic religion provided in any school, and through various means of social communication is subject to the authority of the Church. It is for the Episcopal Conference to issue general norms concerning this field of activity and for the diocesan Bishop to regulate and watch over it."

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Can.806 §1: "The diocesan Bishop has the right to watch over and inspect the Catholic schools situated in his territory, even those established or directed by members of religious institutes. He has also the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools these directives apply also to schools conducted by members of a religious institute, although they retain their autonomy in the internal management of their schools."

⁵⁶ Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools and Academies - September 2012.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, Can.803 §2: "...teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life."

⁵⁸ See Appendix B.

A7.5 Partnership and collaboration

There should be discernible and regularly celebrated links with: the diocese which founded the school or, in the case of a school founded by a religious institute or other Catholic Trust approved by the diocesan bishop, the diocese within which it operates; the parish community or communities it serves; the families of its pupils; and, other Catholic schools in the local area and within the diocese.

A7.6 Religious Education and the whole curriculum

Religious Education “...in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, discipline, general and particular norms of the Catholic Church” should be taught as a core subject, well resourced and integrated clearly into other curriculum areas.⁵⁹ It is for the Conference of Bishops diocesan to issue general norms⁶⁰ concerning the content of the religious education curriculum and for the diocesan Bishop to regulate and watch over it.⁶¹ Above all other staff, teachers of Religious Education should be trained and formed to a high standard.⁶² “*The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils.*”⁶³

A7.7 Liturgy and prayer

Regular liturgical celebrations and daily prayers “... in accordance with the rites, practices, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church” should be at the heart of school life. Opportunities for spiritual retreats should be provided for pupils and staff.

A7.8 Promotion of a Culture of Vocation

In planned and evident ways, regular encouragement should be given to pupils throughout their lives in school to consider life as a vocation. By this is meant not only vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Rather, all pupils should learn to interpret “*their existence in the light of God’s plan*”.⁶⁴ Teachers and staff too, should be given opportunities to reflect on and formed to understand their role within the school as a vocation within education. School chaplains and chaplaincy teams will play a key role in fostering and developing a culture of vocations in Catholic schools.

⁵⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.803 §2: “Instruction and education in a Catholic school must be based on the principles of Catholic doctrine.”

⁶⁰ *Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools in England and Wales*, Department of Catholic Education and Formation, Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England & Wales, 2012.

⁶¹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.804 §1.

⁶² *Code of Canon Law*, Can.804 §2; *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, §96-97, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988; and *Religious Education in Catholic Schools*, Catholic Bishop’s Conference of England & Wales, May 2000, §11-12.

⁶³ *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, 16 October 1979, §69.

⁶⁴ *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002, §55.

A7.9 Chaplaincy

Regular visits to schools of priest chaplains appointed by the diocesan bishop, and visits of deacons and religious should be organised and facilitated. In the case of primary schools, chaplains will usually be the local parish priest.

A7.10 Pastoral care, support and guidance

Clear policies and structures should be in place, which provide pastoral care to children and young people, and adequate provision for children with special educational needs. When sex and relationship education is offered in a Catholic school as part of the curriculum, it should be offered in consultation with parents and always within the teaching and norms laid down by the Catholic Church.

A7.11 Charitable outreach

As part of their distinctive Catholic mission and charitable outreach, Catholic schools should give priority to, and promote, helping to fund projects for the Pontifical Missionary Societies (Missio) and in particular its Mission Together programmes, which encourage children to share their faith and be missionaries to children overseas. Catholic schools should also endeavour, as far as possible, to support other Catholic charities and local charitable enterprises which support the poor and needy. To ensure that efforts are directed towards ventures which conform to Catholic moral and social teaching, priority should be given to Catholic charities and projects approved by the diocesan bishop.

A7.12 Code of Conduct

Behaviour policies should be implemented and followed which set expectations for children and adults based on ethics that are rooted in Gospel values and conform to the teaching of the Catholic Church. These policies should demonstrate the importance of personal responsibility and the need for justice but also facilitate healing and reconciliation.

A7.13 School buildings and physical signs

The primary considerations in the design, construction and maintenance of Catholic school buildings and their premises should be the educational and spiritual needs, physical accessibility, and the health and safety of the teacher and learner. Symbols and Icons of the Catholic faith which are well-crafted and maintained should be manifest externally and internally on the school premises.

Q8 What will enable a personal experience of a Catholic School's Ethos?

A8 The personal experiences of a school's Catholic ethos, which parallel the outward signs, should be encountered by all who come into contact with the school. These personal experiences will be encountered through:

A8.1 Service of the Catholic Church (The school's legal governing document)

Being faithful to its Catholic identity and implementing the religious requirements present in the school's legal governing documentation into all aspects of school life will make evident the role of the school in the service of the universal and local Church.

A8.2 Sharing a mission and vision (Mission Statement)

The shared aspirations of the school community contained in the mission statement should be formulated so as to be clearly rooted in Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The same aspirations should be experienced as a palpable reality through the shared vision the statement inspires and drives in all aspects of school life.

A8.3 Faithful stewardship (Governance)

The members of the governing authority of the school should be aware of their specific roles and responsibilities, their accountability to the diocesan ordinary and ensure that their stewardship and the life of the school manifest, and is faithful to, Catholic teaching and Gospel values. Policies and procedures enacted by the governing authority should enable Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church to be experienced and lived out integrally in the daily lives of the staff and pupils.

A8.4 Personal witness (Leadership and Management)

The personal faith of the Headteacher or Principal, the staff, children and whole school community should witness to the presence of God, the authentic daily living of the values of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Catholic Church which flows from those values. *"The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility... You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching... But your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence... Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness and joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ's teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest."*⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Address to Catholic Educators, Pope John Paul II, September 12, 1984.

A8.5 Communion in the family of the Church (Partnership and collaboration)

The staff and pupils, through their collaboration and partnership with parents and parish, should experience school life as an integral part of the communion of the local and universal Church.

A8.6 Religious literacy of pupils (Religious Education and the whole curriculum)

Through a well resourced provision and guaranteed allocation of curriculum time, children, young people and parents should value Religious Education as the *“foundation of the entire educational process”*.⁶⁶ High quality learning and teaching of Religious Education, combined with its effective integration into all other curriculum areas, should form *“religiously literate young people who have the knowledge, understanding and skills - appropriate to their age and capacity - to think spiritually, ethically and theologically, and who are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.”*⁶⁷

A8.7 Development of the spiritual life (Liturgy and prayer)

The celebration of Catholic liturgies and prayers as an integral part of learning and teaching should enable the school community to become reflective, experience the presence of God and develop a mature spiritual life. Days of recollection and spiritual retreats for pupils and staff will enable the spiritual life engendered in the school's daily and weekly timetable to be experienced more intensely through a dedicated and focused time of prayer and reflection.

A8.8 Encouraging the full potential of every person (Promotion of a Culture of Vocation)

An authentic 'culture of vocation' in a Catholic school will be experienced when the Church's understanding of 'vocation' is approached in a systematic and integrated way across all levels of primary and secondary education. This culture of vocation will enable pupils to experience encouragement and support as they consider all the options that will enable them to make decisions about their future life. Ideally, these decisions will enable them to develop to their full potential. Encouraging and highlighting the presence and the unique role of priest chaplains, clergy and religious in the school will help pupils to experience and see these particular vocations as valued and respected.

A8.9 The spiritual care of pupils and staff (Chaplaincy)

School chaplains and, where appropriate, chaplaincy teams should support, encourage and help to harmonise the Gospel values *“which inform the present life and future direction of the school”*⁶⁸ with the liturgical and prayer life of the school community. Pupils should experience school chaplains as those who 'accompany' them on their journey of faith at a significant and formative part of their life. Chaplains can help *“bring the spiritual life of the school to its most explicit expression”*.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Religious Education in Catholic Schools*, Catholic Bishop's conference of England & Wales, May 2000, §4.

⁶⁷ *Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools*, Catholic Bishop's conference of England & Wales, December 1996, p. 10.

⁶⁸ *A Guide to the Employment of Lay Chaplains in Schools and Colleges*, Catholic Education Service, 2004, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Spiritual and Moral Development across the Curriculum*, Catholic Education Service, 1995, p. 16.

A8.10 The Gospel of life and the dignity of the human person (Pastoral care, support and guidance)

The Gospel of life and the dignity of the human person it promotes should be experienced in the pastoral care, support and guidance given by the school to its pupils and the equal dignity with which those who have special educational needs and disabilities are befriended and treated, etc.

A8.11 The promotion of justice and peace (Charitable outreach)

Catholic social teaching and action are the living fruits of Gospel values. They emphasise the obligation to promote social justice, peace, love for the poor, solidarity among nations and respect for the integrity of creation. This will be experienced through the active participation of the school community in national and international charitable enterprises as well as local community projects for the poor and the improvement of the environment.

A8.12 Moral and ethical behaviour (Code of Conduct)

Catholic moral teaching recognises that our personal freedom is necessarily limited by the rights of others and our responsibility for the common good. Based on that moral teaching, the Code of Conduct in a Catholic school should lead to the formation of human relationships and an ethical behaviour which make the experience of genuine freedom possible.

A8.13 The learning environment (School buildings and physical signs)

Well designed, constructed and maintained school buildings that are accessible to all as far possible, will create a learning environment that reflects the Church's teaching regarding the dignity of the human person and our obligation to care for the human needs of one another. Well-crafted and maintained symbols and Icons of the Catholic faith (e.g. religious pictures, crucifixes, etc.) when displayed in school and throughout its premises will help the school community and visitors to experience and respect the uniqueness and sacredness of this learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The ‘outward signs’ and ‘personal experiences’ of a Catholic school outlined above will be present more or less effectively and in varying degrees from school to school. Equally the effectiveness of the outward signs will also be affected by the personal faith commitment and the subjective disposition of the individual pupils, staff and community it serves. However, “...now, as in the past, the Catholic school must be able to speak for itself effectively and convincingly”.⁷⁰

Significant developments and changes have happened in recent years in education as a result of numerous government initiatives and reforms. These continue apace. All maintained schools will need to meet the challenges and opportunities that accompany this ‘remodelling’.

This document has tried to outline how the Catholic school is able to “*speak for itself effectively and convincingly*” and to make explicit why the Church, continues to exercise a “*prophetic choice*”⁷¹ through its “*investment of human and material resources*”⁷² in Catholic schools.

By seeking and developing ever new ways of placing the person of Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of every aspect of school life, governors, Headteachers, staff, parents and pupils will help to continue to fulfil the primary purposes of the Catholic school whilst at the same time engaging positively with changes and developments in education.

As the 21st Century progresses, envisioning what Catholic schools will look like in the future requires openness and imagination. At the same time, for Catholic Schools to play their full and effective part in the educational provision of that future, it is essential that those who are called to lead and govern them, to work in them and entrust the education of their children to them, are clear about their identity and purpose:

- to assist in the Church’s universal mission
- to assist parents in the education of their children
- to serve the needs of the local Church
- to be a service to society

In the evangelisation of culture and contributing to the common good, the Church recognises that Catholic schools can play a deliberate and vital role. This is why the Catholic Church in England and Wales continues to provide and invest in Catholic schools.

⁷⁰ *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, §3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, §21.

⁷² *Ibid.*

SUPPLEMENT

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE DEFINITION OF A 'PRACTISING CATHOLIC'

Introduction

The heart and expression of Christian life is action flowing from love; love for the One who shows us the Way to Life; love for the One who teaches us the Truth about Life; and love for the One who gives us Life in its fullness - Jesus Christ. *"If you love me you will keep my commandments"*,⁷³ Jesus said to his disciples. To follow faithfully the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Church is therefore, by those who would be his disciples, an act of love.

As members of the pilgrim People of God on their journey of faith, the disciples of Jesus Christ often find themselves confronted with values and substantive life choices, promoted by the society in which they live, that are objectively incompatible with the teaching of their Lord and his Church. This can be a real test of a disciple's love in the practice of their faith.

In a society which has largely acquiesced to the *"dictatorship of relativism"*,⁷⁴ Catholic Christians are called to adhere to Gospel values and to practise moral choices which often are *"contrary to the world's behaviour"*.⁷⁵ This call is particularly pertinent to those Catholics who hold positions of governance, leadership and other key posts in Catholic schools, where the values of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church should be at the heart of the integral formation of the children and young people in their care. As such, the selection of candidates for these posts is crucial.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales requires that certain key posts within Catholic schools are held by 'practising Catholics'.⁷⁶ This Supplement defines what a 'practising Catholic' is for the purpose of these appointments.

Why does the Church insist that being a 'practising Catholic' is a requirement for holding certain key posts in Catholic Schools?

In schools with a religious character, it is already recognised, acknowledged and provided for in statutory legislation⁷⁷ that to fulfil the objectives and activities of a school's particular religious ethos, it is necessary for posts within the school to be filled by those who are members of, or practise the religion of the school. Thus for teaching roles preference may be given to a Catholic and in non-teaching roles in England, to a Catholic where applying an occupational requirement to be a Catholic is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.⁷⁸

⁷³ Gospel of John 14:15.

⁷⁴ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Homily, Mass before the Papal Election, 18 April 2005

⁷⁵ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Homily, Camagüey, Cuba, 23 January 1998.

⁷⁶ See Appendix A, 'Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools', Department for Catholic Education and Formation of the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales, 11 July 2003.

⁷⁷ See Appendix B, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 60 as amended by Section 37 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

⁷⁸ Equality Act 2010 Schedule 9.

Certain key posts require that their holders not only refrain from doing anything “*which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets*”⁷⁹ of the school’s religious ethos but, in the case of Headteachers or Principals, that they are able and fit to “*preserve and develop*”⁸⁰ that ethos and, in the case of certain other designated posts, that they hold “*religious opinions*”,⁸¹ “*attend religious worship*”⁸² and “*give, or are willing to give, religious education*”⁸³ in accordance with the precepts and tenets of the religious faith of the school.

As already stated above, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have collectively mandated that in Catholic schools certain key posts carry a requirement that they are held by ‘practising Catholics’. These are the posts of Headteacher or Principal, Deputy Headteacher or Vice-Principal, and Head or Co-ordinator of Religious Education. Additionally, there are other key leadership posts which directly affect the Catholic mission of a school. These too may be required to be filled by ‘practising Catholics’ with the requisite professional skills.

The specific requirement attached to these posts derives not only from the objectives of the school as a Catholic institution in its fiduciary and legal religious character (the context of the employment post) but also because the performance of the activities concerned with holding these posts are strictly necessary for the school to preserve and develop its Catholic religious ethos⁸⁴ (the nature of the employment post). Consequently, those who hold these posts are required by the context and nature of their occupation to perform specific objectives and activities which are essentially catechetical and religious. They are thus vocational as well as professional in nature.⁸⁵

For this reason, the religious objectives and activities of these posts require the post-holder to strive to model in their lives the values of the Gospel and to adhere, in the substantive life choices that they make, to the teaching of the Catholic Church. They can only be performed therefore by Catholics who practise these objective religious qualities with equally essential professional skills.

In identifying these key posts though, it should not be supposed that this thereby lessens the importance of other positions within a Catholic school. The virtues of all members of staff, non-Catholic Christians and those from other religious traditions make a valuable and treasured contribution to the quality of a school’s Catholic life and ethos.

⁷⁹ See Appendix B, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 60, (5), (b).

⁸⁰ Ibid., Section 60, (4).

⁸¹ Ibid., Section 60, (5),(a), (i).

⁸² Ibid., Section 60, (5),(a), (ii).

⁸³ Ibid., Section 60, (5),(a), (iii).

⁸⁴ Cf. *Christ at the Centre*, Fr Marcus Stock, Diocesan Schools Commission, Archdiocese of Birmingham 2005, pp. 10-15.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, §37.

Is there a clear understanding of what the term ‘practising Catholic’ refers to when applied to key posts in a Catholic School?

The term ‘practising Catholic’ is used by a range of people and not only by those who are members of the Church. However, there are often subjective variations in the presuppositions that form the basis of the term’s meaning. Even when used by those who are members of the Catholic Church, there can be discovered a wide misconception as to what, objectively, constitutes being a ‘practising Catholic’. The term ‘practising Catholic’ can vary in meaning therefore according to the provenance of its use.

For example, in most Catholic dioceses of England and Wales, the diocesan bishop has determined that where there is a need to prioritise applications for places in the admissions policies of schools which are oversubscribed by Catholic pupils, a person is considered a ‘practising Catholic’ if they have been baptised (or have been canonically received into full communion with the Catholic Church) and strive to observe the Church’s precept of attending Mass on Sundays and holidays of obligation. This is perhaps the most simple and common understanding of the term.

However, as we have seen, the term ‘practising Catholic’ is also used by the Catholic bishops of England and Wales collectively as a requirement for certain key leadership and teaching posts. In these circumstances, the requirement is that a person applying or appointed to one of these key posts will be a ‘practising Catholic’ in a way that is much more than the simple and common understanding which is used for a school’s admissions policy.

Unlike a child’s admission to a Catholic school, the key posts referred to carry requirement that goes beyond simple membership of the Catholic Church alone or even regular attendance at Mass. Their occupation requires them to participate in a very specific religious way in the mission of the local and universal Catholic Church; they have a duty to collaborate with, and be at the service of, the bishop’s mission to govern, teach and sanctify the people of God through the work of education.⁸⁶ These religious activities are made provision for in statutory legislation⁸⁷ and made explicit in the contracts of employment.⁸⁸

Integral to the effectiveness and professionalism of the activities and objectives of these key posts is the exercise of a distinct vocation in the Church. This demands a fidelity to Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church which is no less than the commitment required of other vocations and ministries within the Church. Like any vocation to a specific ecclesial ministry, there are two distinct elements; namely, the personal call that the individual discerns within themselves and the confirmation of that call and suitability by the competent ecclesiastical authority within the Church. Therefore, a person’s desire to be appointed to a key post in a Catholic school will also be balanced by the Church’s assessment of their ability to model an authentic Catholic life of faith.

⁸⁶ Cf. *The Catholic School*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §71.

⁸⁷ See Appendix B, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 60.

⁸⁸ *Catholic Education Service Contracts of Employment (Leadership Contracts)*, Section 4.3 and 4.4.

As collaborators with the bishop in the ministry of education, the holders of these key posts are expected to model lives of personal holiness and professional integrity⁸⁹ which are worthy of their high calling and the position of religious trust they are given within the mission of the Church. The religious nature of these posts is the reason for the requirement which demands that they are performed by Catholics who have committed themselves to the integration of their professional excellence with a clear sense of vocation and mission within the Church. Above all others then, these posts must be substantively held and maintained by ‘practising Catholics’.

What then is the objective definition of a ‘practising Catholic’ for appointments to membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school?

To objectively define what a ‘practising Catholic’ is when assessing applicants for membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school, it is necessary to understand that there are general obligations as well as essential components that constitute ‘practice’ of the faith in the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Church’s general obligations for its members require that they strive to live lives of holiness⁹⁰ by being faithful to the teaching of the Gospel,⁹¹ by trying to uphold the values⁹² proclaimed in the Beatitudes,⁹³ by assisting in the Church’s mission to make Christ known to all peoples,⁹⁴ by upholding privately and publicly the Church’s moral⁹⁵ and social⁹⁶ teaching, by endeavouring to follow an informed conscience⁹⁷ and by making every effort to keep the precepts⁹⁸ of the Church. This is the ‘practice’ of the Catholic faith in its widest and all-encompassing sense.

At the heart of these general obligations though, there are essential components for “*full communion*”⁹⁹ with the Catholic Church. These are sacramental initiation (Baptism,¹⁰⁰ Confirmation and the Eucharist) and the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance. The preservation of this full communion is not limited to purely religious activity but is to be an integral part of the whole pattern of behaviour of a member of the Church.¹⁰¹ It is what essentially constitutes being a committed and ‘practising Catholic’.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, §32.

⁹⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.210.

⁹¹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.217.

⁹² *Christ at the Centre*, Section A5, Diocesan Schools Commission, Archdiocese of Birmingham, 2005, p. 8.

⁹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1725-1729.

⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.871-873; *Code of Canon Law*, Can.211.

⁹⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.225 §2 and Can.227.

⁹⁶ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.222 §2.

⁹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1783-1785.

⁹⁸ These are: attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year; reception of Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season; observing faithfully the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence; providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to their ability. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.2041-2043.

⁹⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.205.

¹⁰⁰ For someone validly baptised in a non-Catholic Church or ecclesial communion, this would require their subsequent Canonical Reception into the Catholic Church. Baptism, Confirmation and Canonical Reception can all be objectively verified through the production of a relevant certificate issued by the ecclesiastical authority where the sacraments or reception were conferred. Although, there is no canonical requirement for a register of First Holy Communion to be produced, parish priests can usually provide a reference of regular attendance at Mass for someone claiming to be a practising Catholic.

¹⁰¹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.209 §1.

Therefore, for appointment as a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school, a 'practising Catholic' is to be defined as someone who has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church and who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them from receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not be in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school. Inspired by the Gospel and sustained by God's grace, a 'practising Catholic' will give sincere external expression to their interior faith through specific religious, moral and ethical behaviour which is in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church

Does this mean that a 'practising Catholic' has to be 'perfect'?

The process for appointment as a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school is not, nor should it ever be used as, an appraisal of an applicant's spiritual and moral successes or failures. Assessment of a person's suitability cannot be a subjective judgement about their 'goodness' or 'holiness'. In terms of the Church's general obligations, almost all Catholics fail to live their faith fully and do not give an authentic witness to their beliefs in all aspects or at all moments of their lives. A 'practising Catholic' therefore, no matter how strong their faith in Christ or firm in their commitment to the Church and its teaching, will almost certainly not be a 'perfect' Catholic.

Rather, assessment of a person's suitability must be objectively based on the requirement for the office or post to be held by a 'practising Catholic' as defined in the section above. The only evidence to be taken into consideration in that assessment is of the substantive life choices that they are known to have made and adhere to, both in the personal and public forum; and whether or not those choices are compatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Church clearly lays out the 'way of life' for the faithful in the substantive choices that they make in life:

"Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, Christians are 'dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus' and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord. Following Christ and united with him, Christians can strive to be 'imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love' by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to the 'mind... which is yours in Christ Jesus', and by following his example.

Healing the wounds of sin, the Holy Spirit renews us interiorly through a spiritual transformation. He enlightens and strengthens us to live as 'children of light' through 'all that is good and right and true.' The way of Christ 'leads to life'; a contrary way 'leads to destruction'.

*The Gospel parable of the two ways remains ever present in the catechesis of the Church; it shows the importance of moral decisions for our salvation: There are two ways, the one of life, the other of death; but between the two, there is a great difference."*¹⁰²

¹⁰²Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1694-1696.

Consequently, it is clear that a 'practising Catholic' will be someone who, despite weaknesses and personal sinfulness, decides to make only those substantive life choices which follow the "Way, the Truth and the Life".¹⁰³ These choices are often made at great personal cost and sacrifice but are made freely and out of a profound love for God. This way of life is not vague or unknown but is manifest fully and most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ and unfolded in the teachings of His Church.

There are substantive life choices though which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and objectively impair¹⁰⁴ our communion with the Church for as long as we adhere to them; they are objectively grave in nature and are objectively incompatible with God's law.¹⁰⁵

What are examples of substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church?

Clearly, it would be hoped that any individual member of the governing authority or member of staff in a Catholic school would be sensitive to the very important role that they play in the life and mission of the Church and in the life of faith of the children that their school serves. All those who work in a Catholic school therefore, are required to conduct themselves in a way which does not conflict with the "precept" and "tenets"¹⁰⁶ of the Catholic Church and are bound by their contractual obligations "not to do anything in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the interest" of the Catholic character of the school.¹⁰⁷

There are actions and behaviours which would be considered not only incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church specifically but also incompatible with the professional life and career of any employee within any school.¹⁰⁸ Some examples of these would be:

- dishonesty;
- attending work or undertaking duties whilst under the influence of alcohol or unlawful drugs;
- malicious or wilful damage to any property;
- a serious breach of any relevant code of conduct or professional standards;
- violence to any person;
- conduct giving rise to any child protection issue;
- conduct that is likely to bring the school into disrepute, etc.

¹⁰³Cf. Gospel of John 14:6.

¹⁰⁴Impaired communion within the Church is not to be confused with 'excommunication'. The former results from committing a gravely sinful act or an act that is incompatible with the teaching of the Church but it does not completely separate someone from the life of the Church or from sharing in it in real but limited ways; the latter is the most serious censure or penalty which the Catholic Church imposes on her members and has canonical consequences beyond deprivation of the sacraments and separates them completely from communion with the Church, until the excommunication is lifted.

¹⁰⁵Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1849-1860.

¹⁰⁶See Appendix B, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 60, (5), (b).

¹⁰⁷*Catholic Education Service Contracts of Employment*, Section 4.3.

¹⁰⁸Such conduct may well be in breach of an employee's Contract of Employment and/or amount to actions which could be the subject of disciplinary action. Such behaviour may also be in breach of the: *Teachers' Standards for England*, Teaching Agency, DfE, May 2012 or the *Revised Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers*, General Teaching Council for Wales, 2010.

There are also substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and which may be detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of a Catholic school. Some examples of these would be:

- formal apostasy from the Catholic Church;¹⁰⁹
- maintaining membership of, or giving direct support to, any organisation whose fundamental aims and objects are contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;
- maintaining the publication or distribution, or by any other means of social communication or technology, of material content which is contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;
- a Catholic contracting a marriage in a non-Catholic church, registry office or any other place without dispensation from canonical form;¹¹⁰ or contracting a marriage where one or both of the parties have been previously married (and whose former spouse[s] is[are] living) without the former marriage(s) being annulled or declared invalid by the Church;
- maintaining a partnership of intimacy with another person, outside a form of marriage approved by the Church and which would, at least in the public forum, carry the presumption from their public behaviour of this being a non-chaste relationship; and, where such a presumption in the public forum is not repudiated by the parties within the relationship.

What if a Catholic who has made a substantive life choice which is incompatible with the values of the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church, applies to be a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to a key post in a school?

Catholics, whose choices have resulted in them being unable to receive the sacraments but who otherwise may have been a potential applicant for one of these key posts will, on occasion, sincerely present themselves for consideration. In these circumstances, there is sometimes much pressure on clergy and members of the school's governing authority to overlook these particular substantive life choices. This may spring from a genuine charitable and pastoral concern not to offend or hurt the individuals involved, or because it is considered that their professional skills and abilities in respect of governance or leadership are needed in the school and override all other considerations.

In these situations clergy and members of the school's governing authority should work in partnership with, and follow the advice from, the appropriate officers at their Diocesan Schools Commission or Diocesan Education Service.

¹⁰⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.1364.

¹¹⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, Can.1059.

With regard to appointing only 'practising Catholics', clergy have a clear leadership role and a particular pastoral duty towards those individuals who are unable to be appointed to those positions, by explaining, with the greatest possible care and sensitivity, the Church's requirements and the reasons for these requirements whilst also encouraging them to maintain their life of prayer and faith within the Church.

What if a Catholic, appointed as a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to a key post in a school, subsequently makes a substantive life choice which is incompatible with the values of the Gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church?

As already stated, even the most committed Catholic frequently fails in the full expression of the practice of their faith through personal weakness and sinfulness on various occasions and at particular moments.

These failures in the practice of the faith are, however, distinct from adhering to and maintaining substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and which prevent them from receiving the sacraments. These choices can give scandal potentially both to the Christian and wider community and bring the religious ethos and character of the school into disrepute.

If for any reason a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school seriously contravenes the declaration that they signed as a condition of their appointment, they can be removed from office¹¹¹ by the diocesan bishop or his delegate.

Similarly, all those appointed to key posts within a Catholic school are expected to read and sign the relevant Catholic Education Service Contract. These contracts state that they are: *"...expected to be conscientious and loyal to the aims and objectives of the School, having regard at all times to the Catholic character of the School, and not to do anything detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the same."*¹¹²

Reflecting this contractual obligation, the Catholic Education Service's 'Model Disciplinary Procedure' defines a principal example of gross misconduct in a Catholic school as: *"Conduct which is incompatible with or prejudicial to the religious character of the school or the precepts, or the tenets, of the Catholic Church."*¹¹³

Therefore, if someone who has been appointed as a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school or been appointed to key post in a Catholic school subsequently makes a substantive life choice which is incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church, then their ability to govern or to lead and model Catholic life and faith with ecclesial integrity may cease to exist. In such circumstances, an investigation by those responsible for preserving

¹¹¹ *School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003*, 23(1)c.

¹¹² *Catholic Education Service Contracts of Employment*, Section 4.3.

¹¹³ Catholic Education Service, *Model Disciplinary Policy and Procedure* (April 2012 for schools and academies in England and September 2012 for schools in Wales).

the Catholic ethos of the school will need to be undertaken and, in some circumstances, this may necessitate a member of the governing authority of a Catholic school being removed from office or disciplinary action being taken against someone appointed to a key post, in accordance with the school's formally adopted disciplinary policy.

Any action that diocesan authorities or governing bodies may be required to take within the appropriate procedural and legal parameters should though, be measured, sensitive and exercised with charity and compassion. Working with professional associations, every effort should be made to manage, with dignity and respect, the impact of any action that needs to be taken upon the individuals concerned, their families and the Catholic school community.

Supplement Conclusion

*"If you love me you will keep my commandments"*¹¹⁴

Acting out of love as disciples of Jesus Christ, Catholic Christians are called to model in the substantive life choices they make, the Way, the Truth and the Life of the One who, out of love, laid down his life for them. This love in action is what the 'practice' of the Catholic faith ultimately means. It cannot be reduced to an outward legal conformity to rules or laws but is a response of love to the God who is Love.

Similarly, no ministry or vocation in the Catholic Church can be reduced to the mechanical performance of a set of duties or skills, no matter how excellently or professionally they might appear to be carried out. Without them being lived authentically, in private and public life, they would be insincere.

Members of the governing authority of a Catholic school or Academy and the holders of certain key posts which carry with them a requirement to be a 'practising Catholic', are responsible in law and required by the Church to be able and fit to "*preserve and develop the religious character of the school*"¹¹⁵ and "*not to do anything in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the same*".¹¹⁶

Consequently they must, by the very nature and context of their objectives and activities, be substantively held and maintained by 'practising Catholics'. They carry an obligation of office and a requirement which cannot be fulfilled by someone who does not adhere in their substantive life choices to the teachings of the Catholic Church, or by anyone who does not share the Catholic faith.

¹¹⁴ Gospel of John 14:15.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix B, School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 60, (4); *School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2007*, 8 (1) (a) and the *School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012*, 9 (a) (ii).

¹¹⁶ *Catholic Education Service Contracts of Employment*, Section 4.3.

APPENDIX A

Requirements of the Catholic Church for appointments to membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within Catholic schools

Suggested form of words for inclusion in the written application forms used by dioceses for the appointment of foundation governors in Catholic Voluntary Aided schools and for members of the relevant governing authority in a Catholic Academy:

“I am a practising Catholic in full communion with the See of Rome, and I am not the subject of any canonical censure or penalty; my appointment places a duty upon me to ensure that the religious character of the school is preserved and developed¹¹⁷ and that the school is conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Trust Deed¹¹⁸ of the Diocese of.....; my appointment requires me to comply with the provisions of Canon Law, the teachings of the Catholic Church and such directives made by the Bishop and his Trustees and their agent in respect of the school or other schools situated in the Diocese.”

With regard to the Church’s requirements for appointments to key leadership posts, the ‘Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools’,¹¹⁹ states:

“The posts of Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and Head or Co-ordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics. Other Leadership posts that affect directly the Catholic Mission of the school should, wherever possible, be staffed by skilled practitioners who are committed Catholics. All teachers must respect and support the aims and objectives of a Catholic school.”¹²⁰

The purpose of the ‘Memorandum’ is:

“...to help and guide the members of the governing authority to fulfil its responsibilities to preserve and develop the Catholic character of the school in relation to the appointment of teachers. The governing authority of Catholic Voluntary Aided and Independent schools, including Academies, are the employers of the teachers, to whom they should give clear guidelines about the Catholic character of education and life in their school. As an employer the governing authority must issue the appropriate contract of employment and associated documentation as published by the Catholic Education Service.”¹²¹

¹¹⁷ In maintained schools the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2007, 8 (1) (a) and the *School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012*, 9 (a) (ii) apply. In Academies the legal documents establishing the Academy Trust should make these requirements clear.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 (1) (b) and 9 (a) (iii).

¹¹⁹ Department for Catholic Education and Formation of the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales, September 2012.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Section entitled ‘Selecting Leaders For Catholic Schools’.

¹²¹ Department for Catholic Education and Formation of the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales, Department for Catholic Education and Formation of the Catholic Bishops Conference for England and Wales, September 2012, Section entitled ‘Purpose of the Guidance’.

The expectations set out in the 'Memorandum' are based on the pertinent Canons in the 'Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church':

*"The formation and education in the Catholic religion provided in any school, and through various means of social communication is subject to the authority of the Church. It is for the Episcopal Conference to issue general norms concerning this field of activity and for the Diocesan Bishop to regulate and watch over it. The local Ordinary is to be careful that those who are appointed as teachers of religion in schools, even non-Catholic ones, are outstanding in true doctrine, in the witness of their Christian life, and in their teaching ability."*¹²²

In addition the 'Memorandum' states that the appropriate contracts of employment and the associated documentation published by the Catholic Education Service must be used by Catholic schools to preserve and uphold their Catholic ethos. The contracts used for specific key posts state:

*"You are required to develop and maintain the Catholic character of the School. You are to have regard to the Catholic character of the School and not to do anything in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the same."*¹²³

¹²² Code of Canon Law, Can.804

¹²³ Catholic Education Service Contracts of Employment, Section 4.3

APPENDIX B

Statutory provision for schools with a religious character to maintain their relevant religious ethos

Statutory legislation in England and Wales makes provision for schools with a religious character to maintain their relevant religious ethos. Section 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 makes the following provision:

- (5) If the school is a voluntary aided school -
 - (a) *preference may be given, in connection with the appointment, remuneration or promotion of teachers at the school, to persons -*
 - (i) *whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the religion or religious denomination specified in relation to the school under section 69(4), or*
 - (ii) *who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets, or*
 - (iii) *who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets; and*
 - (b) *regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school, to any conduct on his part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified.*

Section 124A of the Act contains the same provisions for Independent schools as contained in section 60(5). The provisions therefore apply to Catholic Voluntary Aided schools which convert to become Catholic Academies.

Section 37(2)(b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 extended these provisions in voluntary aided schools with a religious character in England (not Wales) to the appointment of non-teaching staff, to have regard to a person's faith where there is an occupational requirement.¹²⁴ An example of such a non-teaching post in a Catholic School is the appointment of a Lay Chaplain.

Schedule 9(3) of the Equality Act 2010 provides for occupational requirements where an employer has an ethos based on religion or belief. The Act is not contravened by applying an occupational requirement to be of a particular religion or belief if, having regard to the nature of the work, it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

¹²⁴ Governing bodies, as the employers, must comply with the Equality Act 2010 which prevents discrimination on religious grounds, save where exceptions are provided for including where being of a particular religion or religious denomination is an occupational requirement. Schools considering whether a particular post has an occupational requirement for a person to be of a particular religion or belief should seek appropriate legal and HR guidance.